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SUBJECT: USNS MERCY AND EMBARKED SEABEES EXCEL AT PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ON THE FINAL STOP OF PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP 2008

REF: A. A) COMPACFLT 06280013
 1B. B) COMPACFLT 06280014
 1C. C) KOLONIA 00000148

11. (U) This cable responds to Refs A and B action request for an evaluation of the USNS Mercy visit to the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). The following answers are keyed to the specific questions.

12. (U) The USNS Mercy visit to Micronesia on the last leg of the Pacific Partnership 2008 mission significantly exceeded expectations. It came at a sensitive point of transition in the U.S.-FSM bilateral relationship. The Mercy mission boosted America's credibility and generated confidence in our strategic partnership in the Pacific region. Confidence in American friendship and commitment has soared and broken new ground as a result of this historic mission.

13. (U) Three aspects of this final port visit in the Mercy 2008 Pacific Partnership voyage that had the most positive effect were: pre-coordination with the Embassy staff, execution of the mission, and senior leadership performance during the mission, including DV visits, clinic site visits, and ceremonies.

14. (U) The following sources helped convey information about the visit: local officials (state and municipal representatives, traditional indigenous leaders and NGO members, along with a Citizen's Task Force in Chuuk); U.S. Embassy media releases; FSM National Government health officials, including the cabinet-level FSM Health Secretary; word-of-mouth through "the coconut wireless," which is often the most common and dependable means of disseminating information in country; print media with advance placements of Embassy media releases two consecutive issues in advance of arrival; distribution and posting of hard copies of these media releases by local partners [See 3.3. A) and B) above] at community gathering places (village centers, community halls, post offices, local businesses, hospitals, clinics, schools, etc.) one to three weeks in advance of arrival; a newspaper interview by the detailed fleet PAO providing essential information; electronic distribution of Embassy media releases via the internet to key contacts in Pohnpei, Yap and Chuuk; reading of Embassy media releases on the air by both public and private local AM, FM, and Shortwave Radio Stations in Pohnpei, Yap and Chuuk; and separate radio interviews by the detailed Fleet PAO (later translated into vernacular for rebroadcast).

15. (U) The USNS Mercy engaged local media using the optimum channels. Detailed 7th Fleet PAO Naval Reservist Ens. Jennifer Franco, USNR, provided excellent support and guidance in assisting post to maximize media engagement in an extremely limited local media environment. Her PD professionalism and attention to detail ensured the greatest possible media coverage. The Embassy Public Diplomacy Chief worked closely with the detailed Fleet PAO and Advance Team Members prior to arrival to plot an effective PD strategy. After arrival,

embarked ship PAO personnel joined this close collaboration. The detailed Fleet PAO and Embassy PD Chief met and worked closely with FSM, Pohnpei State, Yap State and Chuuk State Public Affairs and Public Information Officers to maximize media coverage of the visit. The detailed Fleet PAO and Embassy PD Chief also met and worked closely with FSM, Pohnpei State, Yap State, and Chuuk State newspaper and radio personalities to maximize media coverage of the visit.

¶6. (U) The FSM has no military force. The U.S. is responsible for the external defense and security of the Federated States of Micronesia under the Compact of Free Association. Therefore, there was no host nation military response to the visit and no follow-on recommendations from the Embassy in this regard.

¶7. (SBU) The very positive host nation population response to the visit was summarized succinctly by an American officer of the Guam Rotary Club as follows: "What an AWESOME undertaking. The people of Truk Lagoon don't see or understand the Compact and its funding but they sure saw the Mercy and its crew. What a wonderful group of people. It was America's finest men and women doing what America does best, helping others. On behalf of the American people, who have no idea what you have done, thank you." Embassy offers no recommendations regarding areas for improvement for interactions with the host nation population during future Pacific Partnership or similar missions. The current level appears the optimal possible, in terms of local capacity for effective engagement.

¶8. (SBU) Host nation government response to the visit also proved very positive. FSM President Mori expressed deep gratitude for the coordination, collaboration and partnership. He pointed to the Mercy mission and to recent meetings conducted by his office with the highest level leaders of the US military

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as an indication of the strong relationship between the FSM and the United States. He was extremely grateful for PP 2008 services provided to the FSM. Chuuk State Governor Simina lauded the mission's connections between his people and Americans. He remarked that "the resulting degree of understanding between the two nations will go a long way in advancing and strengthening our already solid friendship and commitment to the betterment of our people and our governments." Embassy offers no recommendations regarding areas for improvement for interactions with the host nation government during future Pacific Partnership or similar missions. The current level appears the optimal possible, in terms of local capacity for effective engagement.

¶9. (U) The Mercy's FSM visit achieved saturation of local media, plus some regional publicity, prior to the actual visit. The Embassy issued an overall media release one month in advance describing the PP 2008 mission and informing residents of the Mercy's imminent arrival. Separate follow-on media releases for Pohnpei, Yap and Chuuk States provided details of scheduled dates, times and venues for upcoming MEDCAPS, DENCAPS and VETCAPS (the latter evolutions taking place only in Chuuk).

¶10. (U) Also during and after the visit, the Mercy mission achieved saturation of local media, plus some regional publicity. During the visit, a newspaper interview and radio interviews in Pohnpei, Yap and Chuuk provided extensive coverage. With funding from the Embassy's Regional PAO, the editor/reporter/photographer of the FSM's sole newspaper traveled with Ambassador to Chuuk and covered the Mercy's arrival ceremony, VIP events, several MEDCAPS, DENCAPS and COMREL events (including an Operation Handclasp turnover). This sponsored travel resulted in a "Special Mercy Issue" of the Kaselehlie Press, which circulated two days after ship departure. The issue featured Mercy-related stories on the cover page, back page, center pages and a total of 272 column inches of PP-related coverage on six of sixteen pages. After departure, the Embassy prepared separate media releases containing statistics and outcomes for Pohnpei, Chuuk and Yap documenting the critical humanitarian services provided by the

Mercy personnel and embarked Seabees.

¶11. (U) Local and regional media coverage of the visit events was overwhelmingly positive in tone. Media repeatedly praised the U.S. Embassy, the U.S. Government, and the U.S. Military for their generosity, compassion and commitment to the welfare of the Micronesian people. Prevailing or recurring themes in the local and regional media included the following. The United States and FSM share a solid and strong historical relationship.

The Mercy mission connected Micronesians and Americans in effective exchanges of ideas, skills and cultural nuances. A core value of the Mercy mission is the relationships it created here. Micronesians share untapped capacity at the grass roots level to improve their lot in life. Micronesians need to eat more local foods to reduce their high incidence of non-communicable lifestyle diseases. The Mercy Encaps significantly improved essential social service infrastructure and made critical public facilities safe to use again. The humanitarianism and compassion of the American people are sincerely appreciated by Micronesians.

¶12. (U) Embassy was extremely satisfied with the level of DOD coordination in advance of and during the mission. LCDR Ryan Collins, LT Aaron Hagar, LT Ryan Pierce, HMCM Noel Manlapaz and CPO Charles Brown all performed at the highest level of professionalism and operational effectiveness, both in advance of arrival and during mission activities in the three FSM states visited.

¶13. (SBU) Pacific Partnership 2008 had a neutral impact on the host nation government's level of preparedness to respond to future humanitarian contingencies. The host nation has no military force. Currently, the FSM depends almost totally on aid from foreign donor nations and NGOs for emergency response and disaster preparedness. While the Mercy visit provided an excellent role model for response to future humanitarian contingencies, the lack of capacity and resources, combined with overwhelming geographic and political constraints, continue to adversely affect local levels of preparedness. Despite such constraints, the visit had a strong impact on raising the visibility of in-country NGOs (especially in Chuuk) and it demonstrated the power and effectiveness of grass roots democracy through mobilization of private citizens and communities to achieve social change.

¶14. (SBU) The host nation has very limited capacity to provide basic social services to its population (virtually none on its numerous outer islands) due to vastly inferior infrastructure facilities, geographic constraints, lack of effective

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self-funding mechanisms and political factors. It has been unable to effectively absorb and efficiently utilize large sums of U.S. Compact and non-Compact funding to implement effective basic social services. It enthusiastically welcomed the Mercy's visit and provision of these services, but there was very little "motivational transfer" in terms of taking on a new sense of urgency regarding social service provision by the host nation.

¶15. (SBU) Pacific Partnership 2008 had a neutral impact on the host nation population's view of their own government. The host nation has no military force; however, the mission had a tremendously positive impact in terms of the local population's view of the U.S. Government and the U.S. Military. In the minds of the people of the FSM, this was almost exclusively a U.S. and Partner Nation initiative. They saw, recognized, and remembered very little participation in the mission by their own government. However, local NGOs were observed and recognized by the host nation population for their roles in contributing to the success of the mission.

¶16. (SBU) Pacific Partnership was very effective in operating "by, with, and through" the host nation. This message could and perhaps should be conveyed more strongly to avoid creating a "culture of expectation." A more active conveyance of the message would prod and provide impetus for the host nation to

undertake a more active role in providing basic social services to its own people.

¶17. (SBU) Embassy recommends a re-visit rate for Pacific Partnership to Micronesia of once every three to four years. We wish we could support such an exercise more often. However, the human and physical resources of this embassy are extremely limited. Also, more frequent visits would risk raising an unrealistic "culture of expectation" and possibly would dissuade the host nation from assuming its own role and responsibility for providing basic social services and emergency response and disaster preparedness to its own people.

¶18. (U) Embassy recommends a continued mix of ENCAP, MEDCAP/DENCAP, VETCAP and SME engagement for future PP missions.

Such a multi-pronged approach best meets the needs of local populations. The focus for future missions might be shifted somewhat from the main population centers to outer islands, to the extent possible, with due consideration for local geographic, transportation and infrastructure constraints. In 2008, however, the right results were resoundingly achieved.

HUGHES